



FEMA

Baptist Bottoms Acquisition Project

Geneva, AL - At the end of a week of rain and flooding in March 1990, about 6,000 people in Alabama had lost their homes or had seen their property damaged. Hundreds more had to seek shelter in neighboring Georgia and the Florida panhandle. Estimated damages throughout the State were at more than \$100 million. The hardship was summed up at the time by Alabama Governor Guy Hunt, who said, "A lifetime of hard work for some disappeared into the raging floodwaters. A lot of our people have never witnessed such devastation from floods before."

Four years later, in early June 1994, Tropical Storm Alberto moved slowly inland, leaving a trail of flooding and destruction along the Pea and Choctawhatchee Rivers. Small towns along these waterways were hit particularly hard.

In the aftermath of the 1994 flood, the Town of Geneva officials developed a model hazard mitigation project. They began an aggressive campaign to convince homeowners in the flood-prone Baptist Bottoms area to sell their homes and relocate out of the floodplain. Eventually, they submitted a grant application to FEMA for the acquisition of 54 homes. FEMA agreed to fund the buyout of dozens of buildings within the floodway of Double Bridges Creek in Baptist Bottoms.

In the first week of March 1998, a heavy storm system from the Gulf of Mexico moved inland across the southeastern United States. Torrential rains swept through the region and caused serious flooding in several Alabama counties. The flooding not only damaged hundreds of homes and businesses, it also took a serious toll on infrastructure. Several bridges and culverts were overwhelmed, roads were washed out, emergency services were delayed, and water treatment facilities were damaged.

The buyout of 30 homes (the actual number acquired prior to the spring of 1998 floods) after the 1994 flood proved to be an effective investment in Geneva. FEMA's benefit-cost analysis determined that for an upfront cost of approximately \$672,000 to acquire flood-prone properties, over \$1.4 million in damages and losses were avoided. All of the acquired properties lay deep in the floodplain, and would have been flooded had they remained. If these buildings had merely been repaired after the 1994 flood, many would have been severely damaged or destroyed in 1998.

This illustration of avoided damages emphasizes a very important point for hazard mitigation planning: the biggest benefits come from acquiring structures at highest risk--that is, buildings which are deepest in the floodplain.



Geneva County,
Alabama



Quick Facts

Sector:

Public

Cost:

\$672,558.00 (Estimated)

Primary Activity/Project:

Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)